



From a Photograph from life by Victor K. Gould

# THE NATIVE CAT.

(DASYURUS VIVERRINUS.)

Helena Forde, del. et lith.



## The Native Cat.

(*Dasyurus viverrinus*.)

HAVING already given a full account of the family of *Dasyuridae* elsewhere, there remains nothing but to add a short notice of the most common and best known of the tribe,—the black and white, or buff and white-spotted “Native Cat” proper.

These little creatures, with their fierce disposition, are familiar to the greater number of Colonists; they inhabit our forests, but prefer to take up their abode with civilized man when they find out that he keeps plenty of meat about his habitation, or rears poultry. They are very savage for their size, and five of them kept in a cage without sustenance for a day only, had almost reduced themselves to the state of the famous tabbies of Kilkenny. The fact is, they devoured each other till only a pair remained, and the savage look and watchfulness of these two animals was amazing to behold.

They are stubborn in the extreme, and appear to care about nothing. We have noticed them to come quite unconcerned into a tent at night, and take up a cosy place near the chimney, from which a firestick only could dislodge them. Another case was mentioned not many days ago, when one of the Tiger Cats actually faced a half-caste man, who was terror-stricken, and ran away. A real aboriginal native, one of the old tribes, would have made short work of such an adversary; but these poor people have now almost died out, and the few still lingering behind cannot even remember the animals which their ancestors hunted.

The common Native Cat of this Colony is about the size of a half-grown domestic Cat; but further south, and more particularly in Tasmania, it grows somewhat larger. The colour is black with white spots, or yellowish-grey with white spots; the tail rather bushy, and uniform in colour, whilst that of the larger Tiger Cat is smooth and spotted with white. The pouch, or rather skin-fold, with which the female is provided contains six teats, but the number of young seldom exceeds four. At a certain age the young are left in the spout-hole or crevice which the mother has selected for them whilst she goes out hunting, and on more than one occasion have we obtained young specimens (the size of a half-grown rat) from such lairs during the parent's absence. They begin to hunt at a very early age; probably they are forgotten by the old ones as soon as they are able to move about and catch something on their own account.

The common Native Cat is destitute of the external fifth toe or thumb on the hind-foot; the bones can be distinguished, however, in the skeleton. With regard to their geographical range, we may safely assert that they are peculiar to the South and South-east Coast and to Tasmania. The interior of the Colony is occupied by another species—*Dasyurus geoffroyi*—which appears to be identical with the northern Native Cat (*Dasyurus hallucatus*). Not a single species has been recorded as inhabiting the West Coast.

(5.v.18-71)